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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of the Maine Department of Education's "Foundations of Inclusive Education," a guide for early childhood professionals, families, and educators on implementing inclusive education for school and preschool children. A basic premise of the guide is that inclusive education is not a separate initiative for children with disabilities but an integral part of school restructuring that promotes high standards for all children. Section 1 of the guide's 4 sections raises awareness of current issues and challenges that face educators as they restructure to meet the needs of all students, including those with disabilities. Section 2 presents the importance of building collaborative partnerships and developing student-centered planning. Section 3 explores options in curriculum design, instruction, and assessment. These practices include multiple intelligences, performance-based assessment, differentiated instruction, and multilevel instruction intended to promote student-centered learning. The final section examines the challenges involved in creating a climate where all children can develop and learn, given the growing diversity in schools and communities. This section also provides a sample framework for working collaboratively to address the needs of individual students, as well as the broader challenges related to administrative, programmatic, and community issues. Each section includes instructor information, objectives, a presentation outline, suggested activities, and review questions. (TD)

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BUILDING INCLUSIVE SCHOOL AND PRE-SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

The Center for Community Inclusion, Maine's University Affiliated Program, includes among its many projects LEARNS and LEARNS Early Childhood, Maine's Statewide Systems Change Initiatives for Inclusive Education and Inclusive Early Care and Education, respectively. LEARNS was established in 1989 as a joint initiative of the Maine Department of Education, the University of Maine, and collaborating school districts. While the initial focus was to create inclusive educational opportunities for students with severe disabilities, the purpose was broadened in 1992 to include all students with disabilities. In July 1993, the Maine Department of Education and the University of Maine received federal funding for a collaborative five year Statewide Systems Change Project for Inclusive Education. In 1994, the LEARNS initiative was further broadened by the Maine Department of Education to address early childhood care and education (LEARNS Early Childhood).

The LEARNS Projects support early care and public school educators by presenting workshops and seminars on inclusive educational practices; conducting on-site planning and technical assistance; providing consultation; sharing information and disseminating resources; developing resource materials; and conducting research and policy analysis.

LEARNS is committed to: enhancing the capacity of Maine's schools, early care settings and communities to provide meaningful and high quality inclusive educational opportunities for all students and children, including those with disabilities; ensuring that all Maine's young children and students benefit from statewide educational reform efforts, including Maine's Learning Results and School to Work; providing state and national leadership in advocating for inclusive education for young children and students with disabilities; enhancing the educational outcomes and pre- to post-school opportunities for children and students with disabilities; supporting families to ensure inclusive educational opportunities for their children; and supporting the collaboration of families, educators and communities to create inclusive education and early care and education in Maine.

As LEARNS and LEARNS Early Childhood staff worked with educators in schools and preschool settings to address these goals, they became aware of the tremendous need for foundational training around disability issues as well as educational restructuring for diverse learners. Although there is a variety of legislation that addresses equal opportunity for all individuals (i.e., Brown vs. Board of Education; Section 504; IDEA; P.L. 94-142; ADA, etc.) there continues to be inequities in the quality of educational experience that exists for children and students with disabilities. Oftentimes, inequities result when educators do not have the appropriate training or necessary supports to provide meaningful learning experiences for diverse learners. In an attempt to address the need for ongoing training for school and preschool educators, the LEARNS staff developed *Foundations of Inclusive Education: A Staff Development Guide*. An overview of the guide, demonstration of the accompanying CD and several sample activities will be offered during this session. Following is a description of the guide and the activities, which will be presented.

Foundations of Inclusive Education prepared by Elizabeth Enright, Mark Fairman, Debbie Gilmer, Martie Kendrick, Linda Labas, Kathy Son, Maria Timberlake and Lucille Zeph, provides fundamental information on inclusive education for school and preschool educators. To conduct educational reform, school/early care restructuring or improvement, a comprehensive, planned approach to staff development is essential. With the

emerging emphasis on a systemic approach to results-driven education (in Maine called Learning Results), staff development must involve all aspects of the system (i.e. curriculum, instruction, assessment, parent and community involvement) and ensure a coordinated effort toward an established set of outcomes. As the information provided in the guide demonstrates, inclusive education is not a separate initiative for young children and students with disabilities. Inclusive education is an integral part of school and preschool restructuring that serves to promote high standards for all children. The information contained in the guide can be used to provide information and discussion about caring for and educating all students. The developers of the guide hope that this material will assist early childhood professionals, families and educators in their efforts to create learning environments in which every child will start school ready to learn, every student will achieve Maine's Learning Results, and all individuals will gain the knowledge and skills they need to play, work and live in their communities.

Foundations of Inclusive Education is designed to be used for staff development in schools, early childhood and community programs interested in learning more about and exploring the foundations of inclusive education. The guide addresses the following questions:

- How is inclusive education distinguished from mainstreaming and integration?
- How is inclusive education part of general education reform?
- What are the implications of standards or outcome-based education for students with disabilities?
- What is objectives student or family-centered planning and how can its use assist in reaching inclusive?
- What educational strategies (i.e., curriculum, instruction, assessment, collaborations, etc.) support effective inclusive education for all students and young children?

Foundations of Inclusive Education is divided into four sections: (1) Creating a Community of Learners; (2) Building Collaborative Partnerships: Student/Family Centered Planning; (3) Bringing It Into The Classroom: Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment; and (4) Addressing Changes and Challenges. Section One, Creating a Community of Learners, looks at the evolution of educational practice over the last 50 years, and reveals how certain attitudes and practices have become entrenched in the system. Differences in some commonly used terms (i.e., "mainstreaming," "inclusion," student centered learning") and the implications each has for how students are taught are explored. Additionally, the quality components of inclusive schools, early care settings and classrooms are considered. Hands-on, interactive activities and discussion are used to explore how personal attitudes, language, environmental design and teaching practices provide the context for creating a caring community of learners. Creating such an educational system that engenders both equity and excellence is a primary concern of many families, educators, and communities. It is recognized however that inclusive school philosophy, improvement plans, policies, and practices do not exist in isolation of current state and national initiatives. Additionally, it is imperative that inclusive education be considered an integral part of school improvement plans and not a separate initiative for students and young children with disabilities. Section One of the guide is intended to raise awareness of current issues and challenges, that face educators throughout the nation as they restructure to meet the needs of all students and children, including those with disabilities.

Activity 1.1 in this section of the Guide will be presented during this session. The activity involves the use of a timeline illustrating the evolution of civil rights and educational legislation around the treatment and education of individuals with disabilities and the accompanying changes in community placements and practices. Participants are asked to note on the timeline the date of their graduation from high school. Discussion ensues around participants' school experiences related to peers with disabilities and how that differs from the way education is conducted today, the opportunities and challenges this presents, and implications for the future. This activity has been well received in many school and early care settings. It is an excellent tool for expanding the understanding of school board and community members who may not understand the current realities for schools.

Section Two, Building Collaborative Partnerships: Student/Family Centered Planning, presents the importance of building collaborative partnerships with the educational setting. Collaborative partnerships are an essential tool for developing individual student-centered plans as well as for providing focus and vision for organizational change in schools, workplaces and communities.

Student or person-centered planning refers to a category of approaches designed to organize and guide change in schools, workplaces and communities for people with disabilities, their families and friends. Frequently used models of person-centered planning include MAPS (Making Action Planning Systematic; Forest and Pearpoint), Path (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope; Pearpoint, O'Brien, and Forest) and Personal Futures Planning (Mount). They differ in form and content but all share common underlying beliefs. These include: (1) an emphasis on the focus person and his/her family and friends as the authorities on what the person likes and needs; (2) a requirement of collaborative action to work toward a person's desired future; and (3) a requirement of time, effort and unconditional personal commitment.

Person centered planning originated in the disability field as people searched for ways to support individuals who had been previously excluded and who were the victims of stereotypes and low expectations. The information in Section Two is designed to help teams begin the process of supporting all members of a school community regardless of labels and challenges. Participants learn about the student centered planning process, and have an opportunity to practice and plan for its use in their own settings. They also learn how the information generated from a student or family centered planning process can be used to develop an individualized education plan for the student. For very young children, a family-centered planning process is strongly emphasized as the foundation for high quality assessment, evaluation and planning for inclusive early care and education for young children with disabilities.

Many educators have found that the person centered planning process can contribute to a reduction in anger, frustration, and communication breakdown as this process serves to both empower families as well as address needed supports for educational staff. Student-centered planning is not a final destination or a fixed model that can be applied to everyone in exactly the same way. It is unique and individual each time it is done because it is the "map" for that child, young adult, and family.

Section Three, Bringing It Into the Classroom: Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, builds on what was learned in Sections One and Two. As staff moves through the process of developing a common philosophy of inclusive educational practices, and learning new methods of gathering information through student centered planning, the next step is assuring that all students succeed in the classroom. With increased attention being placed on educational reform, including a stronger focus on academic excellence and accountability, improving the effectiveness of instruction for all students at all academic levels has received considerable attention. Practices that involve active and authentic learning, multiple intelligences, performance-based assessments, and action research can help to transform schools and early care settings into student/child centered places of inquiry and learning. Interactive experiences such as cooperative learning are often cited as supporting promising outcomes for elementary and high school students and have emerged as methods to study within early childhood education.

"One-size-fits-all instructional approach is being replaced with instruction that is appropriate for a variety of learning styles, that is interactive, and that motivates learners. The newer approaches to instruction, in which diversity is not only recognized but valued and affirmed, are the most likely to be successful in teaching all students, including those who have labels such as 'disabled,' 'at risk,' and 'difficult to teach'" (Falvey & Givner, 1996, p.10).

For educators creating classroom communities where all students and young children can achieve to high standards and have equal opportunities to learn involves broadening assessment and teaching methodologies. In heterogeneous classrooms, students vary by ability, experience, background, gifts, talents and needs. Some

students will require more support, more time, more practice, adult help, or adaptive equipment. Others may need more flexibility to explore a topic in depth, more adult mentoring, or varied opportunities to work both individually, as well as cooperatively with peers. To effectively address the diverse and changing needs of all students, instruction and assessment must be planned pro-actively.

The first task is to know students well, know their needs, styles, and attitudes so that planned lessons can be successful. This is the opposite of adapting lessons after students have failed, or amending preplanned ones. This process involves team planning, identifying the underlying concepts in each unit, and personalizing goals and supports. Assessment information informs instruction and drives the development of personalized, strength driven, instructional plans (for IEP/IFSP, etc.), using the classroom curriculum as a base for all students.

Section Three, in order to address the challenges of creating classrooms where all learners can succeed, explores options in curriculum design, instruction and assessment. These include multiple intelligences, performance-based assessment, differentiated instruction, and multi-level instruction, among others. The importance of identifying learning outcomes, and connecting these with authentic assessment, curriculum and instruction practices that support student/child centered learning is examined.

Finally, Section Four, "Addressing Changes and Challenges," builds on the learning of Sections One, Two and Three to examine how student-centered classrooms create a climate for individual needs to be met. Teaching and caring for children today can be a daunting experience for new, as well as experienced educators and families. Revolutionary changes in the field of disability, reflected in our laws, educational placements and evolving practices challenge even the most progressive professionals to "stay on top of their game." It is recognized that change is inevitable and that efforts to introduce new educational practices and heterogeneity within our schools and early care settings require opportunities for staff to develop new skills and to collaborate and work together to address problems in dealing with change (Inclusion Times, NPR, Spring, 1997). Additionally, creating classroom communities where all children can grow, develop and learn is ever more challenging, given the growing diversity in our schools and communities and the increased numbers of students with mental health, emotional, social and complex health issues. While these changes impel creativity and opportunities, they can also create challenges and stresses. Recent educational studies and surveys identify behavior, student discipline, and children with violent behaviors as the number one concern of teachers and schools (Innovative Discipline, NEA teacher to teacher book, 1994).

Successful schools identify the relevant issues for individuals, both students and professionals, and build supportive structures that allow for creative problem solving. They recognize the importance of environment and climate as the foundation for effective teaching and learning. Section Four considers questions such as: How can educators positively support children with diverse learning styles, special health care needs, and challenging behavior within our classrooms and communities? How can educators, families, administrators and community member be supported to: 1) manage change effectively; 2) proactively address issues on an ongoing basis; and 3) learn and cultivate in-house expertise for developing creative problem-solving mechanisms? Additionally, Section Four provides a sample framework for working collaboratively within a team to address both the needs of individual students/children, as well as broader challenges related to administrative, programmatic and community issues.

An adaptation of Activity 4.1 will provide participants in this workshop an opportunity to experience a backward planning or outcome-based process. Additionally, it offers an opportunity to discuss and think about the elements of a caring community and assists educators in identifying how they can build and enhance a caring classroom. Participants will work in pairs to describe a caring classroom where safety, relationships, choices and respect are valued. They will discuss what the physical environment would look like; what an educator could do to promote this; and what students could be observed doing in this setting. This will be followed by large group facilitated discussion.

Foundations of Inclusive Education is organized for easy use as a staff development tool. A section on "Helpful Hints" makes practical suggestions for preparing a workshop or training; presenting a training; using the guide itself; and using the accompanying CD and video. Each of the four major instruction sections includes instructor information; objectives; presentation outline; and suggested activities. Handouts and transparencies are provided and clearly labeled. The CD includes all handouts and transparencies, which can be adapted for use within varying educational settings. At the end of each section, review questions are offered to assist in clarifying and integrating the learning that has occurred. The presenters of this session will provide representative handouts from the guide. Order forms for the guide and CD will be available.

The LEARNS team at the Center for Community Inclusion, Maine's UAP, has presented the information contained in this staff development guide to a number of school, early childhood and early intervention teams across the state. Training brochures invited each setting to send a team and identified the roles that might be represented. Since the guide is intended to support the concept of educational reform for all students, including those with disabilities, it was important that the teams reflect representatives from various stakeholder populations, for example, administrative staff, teachers, both regular and special education, and parents. Additional team members may include the student with a disability, school or agency board members, community members, family supporters, etc. Getting the right people to the table and leveling the playing field, which these seminars have reliably done, provides an exceptional opportunity for personal growth and the development of collaborative leadership. The designers of this guide have been impressed with the creativity, energy and enthusiasm expressed during the two-day seminar. Individuals who might previously have "come to the table" in conflict, began working together to figure things out in a neutral setting, over common concerns. This was an unanticipated but most welcome outcome.

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